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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003509

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: CHP TAKES A TACTICAL VIEW OF REFORM

(U) Classified by PolCouns John Kunstadter. Reason: 1.5  
(b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Opposition CHP has publicly, and privately in meetings with us, endorsed the AK government's EU reform package but has rejected AK proposals to sell state-owned forestry lands and to allow local administrations more control over health and education services. The CHP stance reflects in large part a tactical political interest in weakening AK in the months leading up to the next nation-wide local elections. End Summary.

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Principled Opposition?  
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2. (C) CHP officials at all levels have spoken publicly in favor of AK's efforts to push through an ambitious sixth EU reform package. Senior CHP M.P. Bulent Tanla recently confirmed to us privately that CHP will support the AK package unconditionally.

3. (C) However, on other key reform proposals, including some that are crucial to promoting better governance and democratization, CHP has balked for tactical political reasons.

4. (C) In recent meetings, senior CHP deputies have argued with limited conviction that AK's proposals to decentralize the Turkish state system by giving more power to elected local authorities, and to sell lands still classified as forest although have since developed without title, are deeply flawed. These measures require constitutional amendments. In separate meetings recently, the CHP M.P.s -- High Administrative Board members Hakki Akalin and Fuat Cay and senior party economist Kemal Kilicdaroglu -- alleged that AK is trying to engineer these proposals only to benefit AK supporters.

-- On local administrative reform, both Akalin and Cay argued that CHP opposes AK's proposals on the grounds that the GOT should first tackle parliamentary immunity -- a major CHP campaign theme in the Nov. 2002 elections. Akalin and Cay admitted that local reform figures prominently in CHP's election program, yet Akalin weakly dismissed AK's efforts, saying, "You need to read the proposed legislation for yourself to understand our objections."

-- Kemal Kilicdaroglu May 27 offered a more typically Statist (and tenuous) criticism of AK's proposed legislation. Kilicdaroglu explained that AK's proposal will give "too much power" to the mayors of large towns. This would only foster open disagreement between the elected mayors and governors, who are assigned by the State. Kilicdaroglu also alleged that smaller provinces will have a hard time collecting enough revenue to support themselves, while larger provinces like Istanbul will have more than enough funds. When asked if there were other means available to address the potential imbalance while promoting local control, he demurred.

-- Akalin claimed that some forestry land in Istanbul province is clearly being earmarked for an unnamed AK supporter. Cay averred that AK "has no clear plan as to what will be done with the land after it is sold." However, both sheepishly acknowledged once again that selling the same land parcels is part of CHP's own party program. Moreover, neither could articulate an alternative to AK's proposals.

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Baykal's Permanent Campaign  
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5. (C) Some CHP contacts acknowledge to us privately that party leader Baykal is pursuing this strategy not for any principled reason but simply to exploit divisions within AK's

parliamentary group and use it as a platform to hammer AK on the parliamentary immunity issue. Former CHP M.P. Erol Cevikce -- once very close to Baykal -- explained to us May 16 that the CHP leader believes ultimately AK will split: "in fact, he's counting on it." CHP's current opposition to some of AK's reform efforts, Cevikce noted, is due in part to CHP's inability to garner more public support as a result of its anti-war, anti-USG policy in the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

16. (C) Cevikce added that everything CHP is doing right now is meant to increase CHP's chances in the local elections, which must be held by April 2004 but which AK could advance to autumn 2003. Success in the local elections would help position Baykal and CHP for the next national elections and another shot at the prime ministership. "Baykal has seen the likes of Yilmaz, Ciller and even Erbakan become Prime Minister," he said, "so why not him?" Former CHP deputy Sabri Ergul subsequently echoed Cevikce's comments, noting that Baykal sees local elections as a big test to determine whether he has solidified his place as CHP leader -- and as a national leader. Ergul averred that CHP will choose local candidates who have the best chance of winning regardless of political background -- a strategy subsequently confirmed by Kilicdaroglu.

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Politics as Usual  
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17. (C) Many in CHP genuinely recognize the need for reform along EU lines, especially given overwhelming public support for change -- although it is worth keeping mind that as the Party of Ataturk, CHP has traditionally indexed its policy to the Establishment view. On other essential reforms, however, CHP's stance is that generally adopted by Turkish opposition parties -- to reject whatever the government puts forward. As such, it's not surprising that our CHP interlocutors cannot elucidate alternatives to AK policies, and instead fall back on the shop-worn Turkish political truism we hear routinely from M.P.s and others: "we're in the opposition; what do you expect?" In this context, the idea that Baykal and his cronies are acting less out of principle and more for tactical reasons conforms to well set patterns.

18. (C) From CHP's perspective, playing on AK's divisions offers probably the only chance the party has to make inroads in the local elections. For example, CHP prospects in Ankara revolve around whether the conservative vote will split between current mayor Gokcek -- a former Refah and Fazilet member who has had run-ins with P.M. Erdogan -- and a new AK candidate. (Note: there are signs Erdogan and Gokcek are aware of this and are trying to mend fences. End note.) Likewise, CHP may be hoping that the most ardent opposition to AK right now, Motorola deadbeat Cem Uzan's Genc Party, will hive off a significant share of AK votes.  
PEARSON